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LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY

Why Write a History of Your Church? *Prof. Charles J. Kennedy*

The usual occasion for writing a history of a local church is its anniversary. The writer may be the pastor or an interested lay member. Whoever is selected, he should seek advice and help of the state conference committee on history and other local church historians if available; also of town libraries, and the older members of the church. The Congregational Christian Historical Society stands ready, of course, to aid local and state church historians, be they amateurs or professionals, with ample histories and other materials.

As with most histories, the history of a local church is valuable largely for its cultural contribution. When one begins to study the historical background of his own church he acquires an understanding of the lasting values of the Christian church and its influence in the community.

The significance of our forefathers' efforts and trials in establishing and maintaining a church and its auxiliaries is truly great. Some of us take considerable pride in the fact that our churches are descended from the Pilgrim and Puritan Fathers, and know something of the heritage that came out of the struggles of our denominational forebears. And yet, how many of us know the story of our predecessors in our own home state, or even in our particular local church? That history is significant and often more interesting because it is closer to our own church experience.

The story of each congregation, told simply and truthfully, may be rich in instruction. Most of us are apt to forget, or may not even have known, that the problems in our church today are not new but are in essence problems similar to those our Fathers faced. By a study of our own history we learn of the danger in allowing our interest to decline in church affairs. We know churches have been depleted because certain individuals insisted upon personal whims or biased opinions. Indifferent leadership has destroyed the work that took years to accomplish. To know how these conditions came to be can serve as a lesson for today.

There are other significant chapters that are cheerful and encouraging. For example, the patient and wise services of a pastor, or the untiring efforts of a layman, often are the paramount reasons for the successful and encouraging growth of a church. Again and again, studies of our local churches have shown the great role played by ordinary men in their everyday tasks of participating in church activities. This will be found to be true in the formative years of all churches. The knowledge of the heroisms and labors of the past can be of high value for the present.

The history of a church is not merely something that we and others have left behind us; it moves along with us. Often, it is true, we fail to notice the past and all that it may mean to us. The value of our history is more than sentiment. An understanding of what has gone before should give us a better attitude in furthering the usefulness of our local church and denomination to its members, to the community, and to the missionary fields.

CONCERNING THE LOCAL CHURCH HISTORIAN

Note: It is not to be expected that the historian when first appointed will attempt all the duties listed herewith, but will consider which of these suggestions, that have come from historians, may be appropriate for the particular church.

1. The Church Historian should be elected by a responsible church body, assigned specific duties and be given a modest expense budget. He should seek close cooperation with the pastor and church clerk. In some churches the same person is assigned the duty of clerk and historian.

2. Careful personal preparation is essential. The historian should know the history and publications of the Conference, the national agencies, the Boards, also the *News Letter*, and *Advance*, and have a denominational history.

3. Old diaries, histories and documents should be collected and deposited for safekeeping with the Congregational Christian Historical Society or one of the denominational depositories. A record should be compiled of persons who have interesting historical documents, books, and heirlooms in their possession.

4. If there is a church library it should be supplied with books on our denominational history. The reading of church history should be encouraged and assistance given to high school and other students who may be writing on an historical topic.

5. Town and State libraries and historical societies should be cultivated and supplied with a copy of the local church history, the State Conference paper, and *Advance*.

6. A brief chronological record should be kept of interesting events as they occur, and **a scrap book** or carefully indexed folders should be kept for pictures, newspaper clippings relating to the church, its organization, its members, special programs of interest, published material from the pastor or other members; also photos of significant groups carefully preserved for future celebrations, **with names and dates properly entered.**

7. A file with copies of (1) circular letters to members, letters from absent members; (2) reminiscences by older members concerning people and events of the past; (3) State Conference paper and programs of special interest. A special file of Sunday church bulletins should be kept.

8. The historian should maintain close relationship with the national Congregational Christian Historical Society, create interest in it that the church maintain membership in the Society, and nominate interested individuals for membership. Secure copies of the *News Letter* for the literature table.

9. The historian should attend Association, Conference and other church meetings when possible, and should send items of interest to the State Conference paper, *Advance*, and the local paper. Preserve all such publish notices.

10. For Forefathers' Day and other a niversaries adequate time should be taken f careful preparation and literature secured. Wh the pastor or a special committee will usual be in charge of such celebrations, the histori should always be ready to render such servi as may be desired. The historian should ke a careful record of the preparation for the pr gram of such anniversaries and a complete f of all published materials.

11. The report. A brief report may made at an annual meeting if and when spec events occur, as anniversaries, new building new organizations formed, changes of pastorat ordinations, and participation in communi and denominational affairs.

An Able Leader

Professor Charles J. Kennedy of the Depa ment of Economics, University of Nebrask became interested some years ago in local chur history and he was elected (1947) State Co ference Historian of the Nebraska Conferenc At that time the Conference adopted the f lowing By-Law:

"There shall be a department of history, t purpose of which is to promote the appreciati of church history through the encouragement published research, the collection and preserv tion of historical materials, and adequate prepar tion for church, association, and conference a niversaries. . . ."

Dr. Kennedy and his associates made a ca ful study of the whole field and published the findings in an 8-page pamphlet in 1948 of ve high usefulness. He has kindly summarized h thought on this topic in our leader (page 1 The Nebraska Conference celebrates its Ce tennial next year when it is expected that co siderable attention will be given to the signi cant events of the history of that great state.

Church Historians Meet

Thirty-one men and women, interested the work of the local church historian, met the Congregational House, Boston, Tuesda June 12th, to consider the duties of this i portant church official. Mr. Herbert A. Sno Arlington, Mass., a long-time local church hi torian, was the convener and by request serve as chairman. He presented a list of topics th had been selected by Mr. Snow and Dr. Ea Douglas of the Massachusetts State Conferenc and others. Each topic elicited serious thin ing. Included in the list were: how church hi torians should be elected; term of office, dutie relationship to the Congregational Christia Historical Society; cooperation with churc clerk; report of historian; responsibility for a niversary; history of church, and the protectio of records.

Future meetings of this group are bei planned.

PREPARING FOR A CHURCH HISTORY

e history of a church is a recital of how up of people have over the years united rship God, to train their families in Chris- teaching and action, to enrich the life of community, and to further the kingdom g people near and far.

at the history may be a worthy record re- s that attention be given to the people who gh the years have contributed thought, ty, and resources for the development and tenance of the church. To this end a l gathering of material is necessary. From xperience we find churches seeking their ecords in these and other categories:

Vhen, where and by whom was the church unded? Where is the record preserved?

Vhat buildings have been erected, where, ien, pictures, story.

Vhat ministers have served the church? ame, education, other pastorates, photo, tes as to service, results of the pastorate, nding in the community, in the fellowship.

rsons who have gone from the church into e-long religious, educational or social wel- e work, with brief biographical notes.

rticipation of the church or its members denominational life, delegates to church eetings, members of boards and agencies, tertainment of Association, Conference d other denominational agencies, with cord of missionary and benevolent contri- tions year by year.

rticipation of the church or its members community enterprises, local benevolent d educational institutions, inter-church airs, public office held by members, and rticipation in political and economic life.

) Action taken by the church relating to estions of public welfare or social issues, al, state, national.

) Relationship to local schools, teachers, hool Board members, P.T.A.

ecords of previous celebrations or anni- rsaries, dedication, re-dedication, and of spitality given to Association, Conference d other organizations.

l for Thought

should like to call the attention of our ty to the need for modern biographies of utstanding personalities within our house- of faith. Such works as the *Lives of the Fathers of New England* are long since f date and style. Especially do we need books for our children and young people. uld like to recommend that our Society operation with the Division of Christian ation and the Pilgrim Press seek to meet eed, that the rising generations not grow norant of their spiritual ancestors."

L M. STEECE, *Minn. Conference Historian*

CHURCH ANNIVERSARIES

Arranging for an anniversary celebration of a church is an exceedingly important matter and should engage the attention of the pastor and his helpers in making plans in good season. Records of previous celebrations and the anniversary programs of other churches should be carefully studied. If a history of the church is to be written there should be adequate time for its preparation. (Samples of anniversary programs may be had from the Society's office and local church histories may be borrowed for the assistance of the anniversary committee.)

Community participation. It has been found helpful to appoint a citizens committee to assist the church committee in the preparation of plans and program. Similar participation may be secured from **other churches** of the community and also from the Association and the Conference.

Letters from absent members and from public officials, state and national, are often secured and add to general interest.

Pageant. If you plan an historical pageant send to the Society's office for samples. A pageant adds much to the interest of the community and to the educational value of the celebration, but great care and much work must go into it.

Reporting the celebration. The historian should be mindful that a report of the celebration be made to local press, to the Conference paper and to *Advance*, and clippings preserved. Also, two samples of all printed matter, programs, pageants, and history should be sent to the Congregational Christian Historical Society for permanent filing.

The Hawaiian Celebration

The third Sunday in October is celebrated in Hawaii as "Mission Sunday" by action of the Hawaiian Evangelical Association. It is the Sunday closest to October 15th, the date in 1819 when the missionary church was organized in Boston to be transplanted to the pagan islands of the Pacific. It recognizes our debt to the missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of the Congregational Christian Churches who planted the first churches in these islands.

Mainland churches are invited to share in this worthy celebration.

From a Letter We Appreciate

Gladys L. Weiss, historian of Pilgrim Memorial Church, Jamestown, N. Y., writes, "I am in the midst of writing a history of this church and I find it a fascinating and worthwhile project and will appreciate information concerning the former pastors as listed for whom we lack material."

SOCIETY AFFAIRS

OUR EXPANDING PROGRAM

This summer number of the *News Letter* is illustrative of one phase of the Society's work which concerns the **local church's own history.** Some years ago a state superintendent wrote us: "As I visit about I find most of the churches and the towns also 'hazy' on their history, and so few of them have any history in printed form or records kept in security!"

We discovered how true these words were when we began to receive **letters** from churches all over the country asking for information relating to their own history, and as the years go by this correspondence has multiplied. We are often able to help inquiring churches from our own records and from other sources, and to give advice for church anniversaries. This we are very glad to do. We believe this wide field of usefulness will have increasing effectiveness in the years to come.

We have constant calls for help from students and writers. There is a nation-wide revival in interest in history. This rising interest is evidenced by the letters we receive from **high school and college students** seeking information. From Board, Conferences and Council there comes a steady flow of inquiries; from newspapers and magazines, from news agencies. Approximately one-third of our phone calls begin with "will you please tell me. . . ."

There is a steady increase in the calls from churches and secular agencies for **speakers** for historical occasions and we are gradually building up a group of Fellows of the Society who are prepared to serve as occasion offers.

The **overall task** of the Society in brief is to awaken and to cultivate an appreciation of the values in the history of the local churches, of the Conferences, of the national agencies and of our whole fellowship. This is a worthy task not only for the present but, we believe, for the future.

THE BUDGET OF THE SOCIE

Anticipated Expenses

Rent	$ 51
Tel. & Tel.	5
Postage and Mailing	45
Supplies and Books	15
Meetings and Travel	35
Printing and Mimeo.	80
Secretarial asst.	2,42
Secretary	1,60
Advertising and Misc.	17
S. S. (Society's share)	9
Contingencies	50
	$7,10

Sources of Expected Income

The General Council	$2,00
The American Board	50
The Board of Home Missions	75
The Conferences	1,35
The Churches	1,75
Individuals	70
Seminaries	5
	$7,10

MEMBERSHIP IN THE SOCIE

1. Contributing National and State agencies voting members of the Society and name resentatives to the Board of Governors.
2. Churches contributing $10.00 or more per become full voting members and those tributing less become associate members of Society.
3. Individuals contributing $5.00 or more year become sustaining (voting) members those contributing less become associates the Society.

All contributors receive the *News Letter* other publications and reports of the Soc

NOTE: Contributions approved for Income Credit by U. S. Income Tax Bureau.

A LETTER TO "EVERYBODY"

Dear Everybody:

Years ago when our children were away at school their letters home would be with the words "Dear Everybody." This, I imagine, is common practice in la families. I now venture to follow this good custom in writing this letter to the la "family" of our Congregational Christian fellowship.

An important fact for us to face in family conference is our need for more finan support from individuals and churches. If "everybody," after reading this letter dressed to him (or her), would forthwith endeavor to add one individual or church, or both, to our membership, our Society would be blessed indeed. It wo be able to plan its work with new courage and confidence. We are counting on y dear Everybody, to give us your help at this time.

Our Society is doing a worthy work for our fellowship and will have an even m vital work to do as we join in the spacious fellowship of the United Church. Our sh in the union, like that of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, will include a tory and a heritage to be cherished always.

As you may know, the Missions Council has approved the month of Septem for our Society's annual appeal. So we ask you, please, if you or your church is no member to kindly renew your membership; if not a member that you join with us sending your membership contribution, without delay, to the Society.

Sincerely yours, ARTHUR H. BRADFORD, *Presiden*

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